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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses reflective teaching and critical thinking skills in novice teachers and examines potential best practices for the 21st century. The paper shares findings of a 3-year qualitative study regarding the effect of four procedures on the developmental dynamics of reflective teaching and critical thinking skills in beginning teachers. During the study, participants reflected over the four procedures: bi-daily journals, bi-weekly journals, visitation journals, and reflective interviews. Researchers classified procedures into categories over three stages to determine the dynamics of reflective growth. Stage 1 occurred during weeks 2-6, with novice teachers included in activities such as observing cooperating teachers, assisting by working with small groups of students and/or team teaching, and gradually increasing teaching responsibility. Stage 2 occurred during weeks 7-11, with most novice teachers having complete control of all teaching responsibilities. Stage 3 occurred during weeks 12-16, when there was a gradual downsizing in novice teacher responsibility and more opportunity for novices to view their experienced cooperating teachers back in action. The study found that as each stage advanced, autonomy and structure in deliberation regarding moral and ethical imperatives increased. Procedures stimulated reflective growth in novices in a variety of ways. The study raised several questions about reflection and student teaching. (Contains 10 references.) (SM)

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UNDERSTANDING THE REALITIES OF REFLECTIVE TEACHING: WHAT ARE BEST PRACTICES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY?

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Understanding the Realities of Reflective Teaching:

What are Best Practices for the 21st Century?

Some have implied that the term reflective teaching is redundant (Borko & Michalec, 1997; Colton & Spark-Langer, 1993; Feldman, 1997; McMahon, 1997). In order to teach, don't we have to think about our teaching? Isn't such thinking the same thing as reflecting on our teaching? If a teacher never questions the goals and values that guide their work, the context in which they teach, or never examines their assumptions, then is that individual engaged in reflective teaching (Costa, 1995; Glen, 1995; Papoulia-Tzelepi, 1996; Posner, 1996)? There appears to be a distinction between teaching that is reflective and teaching that is technically focused.

The purpose of this presentation is to: (a) enter into dialogue regarding the realities of reflective teaching and critical thinking skills in novice teachers and to discuss what might be some best practices for the 21st century; (b) share findings of a 3 year qualitative study regarding the effect four procedures had on the developmental dynamics of reflective teaching and critical thinking skills in novice teachers. Perhaps this dialogue will advance our understanding of effective reflection and the types of reflective activities in which novice teachers should be engaged. Further, this discussion should elevate our knowledge of teacher reflection as

it relates to the conference theme of, "The 21st Century: A Time for Excellence and Equity."

Let us begin our deliberation with a few probing questions such as, what are the realities of reflective growth and effective critical thinking skills in novice teachers? What are reflective activities you engage your preservice teachers in? What are barriers that prevent effective reflection from occurring? What are best practices that enable individuals to critically examine their own teaching effectively and with equity?" Now we will share some information from our past experiences as we have researched this topic (Pultorak, 1996; Pultorak, 1993).

Our most current investigation was a three year qualitative study researching the developmental process of the presence and character of teacher reflectivity in elementary and secondary novice teachers. Participants reflected over four procedures: bi-daily journals, bi-weekly journals, visitation journals, and reflective interviews. Advancing Van Manen's conception of reflection, procedures were classified into categories over three stages to determine the dynamics of reflective growth.

Stage 1 occurred during the second through sixth weeks. During this time frame, novice teachers were included in activities such as observing their cooperating teachers, assisting by working with small groups of students and/or team teaching, and an average increase in teaching responsibility of

one new content area or period per week.

The interval of stage 2 occurred during weeks seven through eleven. During this middle five week time frame, most novice teachers were engaged in complete control of all teaching responsibilities.

During the final five weeks, a gradual downsizing in teacher responsibility occurred. This provided the novice an opportunity to view their experienced cooperating teacher back in action.

Data suggest some interesting results. First, as each stage advanced, autonomy and structure in deliberation regarding moral and ethical imperatives increased. This was more apparent during reflective interviews which included structured guidance. Second, procedures stimulated reflective growth in novices regarding events critical to the dynamics of teaching, themes of patterns in their teaching competency, comparisons in testable techniques for deficient instructional skills, and decisive self-evaluation of specific lessons. Further, teacher reflectivity has the potential of moving us toward a refined description of how individuals transform from novice thinking to expert understanding.

In conclusion, several questions were raised as a result of this study. First, does guidance from university supervisors increase student teachers' ability to reflect within all three categories? If so, to what extent? Second, do reflective activities increase student teachers' self-esteem? Speculation

would indicate yes. Third, do reflective activities effect teaching performance? If so, in what way? Fourth, how much time should be spent in reflection? These and other questions remain to be answered. As a result of this and other studies, however, it is becoming more apparent that the facilitation of teacher reflectivity should be a vital part of teacher education programs.

Finally, based on your investigations and what we have shared, what might be the top 3 best practices for fostering reflective teaching and critical thinking skills in novice teachers that will help ensure excellence and equity for the 21st century?

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